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November/December 2013

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* Quiz: Which gingerbread house are you?

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Cover Credits: Wardrobe styling: Aubre Andrus. Hair: Cindy Stutzel.

AMERICAN GIRL® (ISSN 1062-7812, Canadian Sales Agreement Number 40635507) is published bimonthly by American Girl Publishing, 8400 Fairway Place, Middleton WI 53562. Copyright © 2013 American Girl. All rights reserved. Subscription rates: One year (six issues) $24.95. Non-U.S. subscriptions $29 U.S. Funds. Single issues (current or back copies) $4.95. Prices subject to change. Periodical postage paid at Madison, Wisconsin, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to American Girl, PO Box 5535, Harlan IA 51593-1035.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: 800-234-1278. SUBSCRIBER: Send change of address information six weeks before moving to American Girl, PO Box 5535, Harlan IA 51593-1035. Send old address label (recent mailing label is best), new address, and new telephone number, or call 800-234-1278. Occasionally, American Girl makes its list of adult and family names available to other reputable companies for their offering of products and services. We make every effort to ensure that girls' names are not included on this list. If you prefer not to receive such mail, please call our customer service department at 800-234-1278 or write to us at 8400 Fairway Place, Middleton WI 53562.

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AMERICAN GIRL IS PUBLISHED BY
AMERICAN GIRL PUBLISHING
8400 Fairway Place
Middleton WI 53562
E-mail address: readermail@americangirl.com
americangirlmagazine.com

Recommended by Parents' Choice, 2013

The National Magazine Awards Finalist

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Volume 21, Number 6

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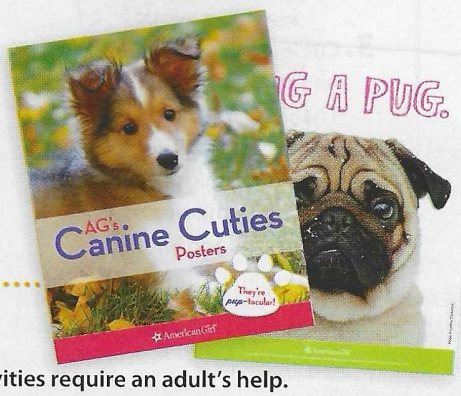


Cover photo: Steven Talley

Safety first!
Some of our projects and activities require an adult's help.
When you see this symbol, be sure to ask an adult to work with you.

Girls EXPRESS®

Thanks Given

Add a leaf of thanks each day until your pretty tree is filled.

1. Ask an adult to help you trim a **craft branch** (available at craft stores) into a tree shape.

2. Fit a piece of **florist's foam** into a **decorated container,** and push the tree trunk into the foam. Cut a piece of colorful paper to cover the foam if you want.

3. Cut leaves out of **colorful paper.** Each day before Thanksgiving, write on a leaf something that makes you feel thankful. Attach the leaf to the tree using **craft glue,** and let dry.

Meet an AG Reader

Daina D.
Age 9, Georgia

In my free time, I like to bake things such as brownies, cakes, and cupcakes.

On a Saturday afternoon, you can find me practicing cheer and gymnastics.

A word to describe me: quiet

My best day was the day after my ninth birthday. I had gotten lots of great gifts for my birthday, but the next day there was a big box at my door. I opened it, and there was a mixer inside, just for me!

I can't live without my family, friends, and electronics.

My dream birthday party would be at a place where we could jump on trampolines and play in a ball pit.

In 20 years, I'll be the owner of my own dessert shop.

My favorite part of AG: I like the crafts and the cooking section.

Introduce Yourself!

To find out how to be a featured reader, go to americangirl.com/playmagazine

Illustrations: Tracey Wood

Shining Star

Gabriella M. has spent the past year doing everything she can to help other kids. The Virginia 10-year-old raised thousands of dollars for a group that grants wishes to kids who are very sick. She's given money to cancer research, donated her hair to a group that makes wigs for kids who lose their hair, and worked hard to help people better understand cancer.

All of that is pretty amazing. It's even more amazing that Gabriella has done all this while fighting her *own* cancer.

Around Thanksgiving a year ago, doctors found a brain *tumor*—that's a growth of cells in the body that's not meant to be there. It turned out that Gabriella had cancer.

The illness meant that she could ask for a wish from the group that grants kids' wishes. She asked for her own wish but soon focused on making sure that other sick kids would have wishes granted, too. A department store had promised to donate $1 for each letter to Santa that it collected during the holiday season. Gabriella got help starting a social-media page that asked for people to send the Santa letters, and the letters poured in. In the end, Gabriella's effort raised $275,000 for the wishes group—enough to pay for wishes for about 36 other kids.

Since then, Gabriella has won a big volunteering award and given speeches about cancer to enormous crowds. She's busy—but never too busy to look on the bright side and figure out new ways to help others. Her family has even started a charity to raise money to cure cancer like hers. Says Gabriella, **"My motto is: 'You might have a bad day today, but there's always a bright shining star to look forward to tomorrow.'"** ★

You can shine, too.

Raise money with a bracelet sale, bakery stand, or neighborhood chores. Then get help from a parent to find a charity that supports a cause you care about—whether it's animal welfare, homeless families, or childhood cancer research. Even small donations are great gifts.

Sugary Scenes

Use candies to make sweet holiday decorations.

Choose a **clean, clear jar.** Make trees, snowmen, and other decorations by piercing **toothpicks, food-safe sticks,** or **stir sticks** through **gumdrops, marshmallows,** and other **soft candies.** Make a base for each stick using a large gumdrop, and arrange in the jar. (Trim the gumdrop to expose a sticky side if needed.) Cover the gumdrop bases with **coarse sugar.**

Press harder candies into soft candies to get them to stick.

Draw faces with food-safe markers (available at baking stores).

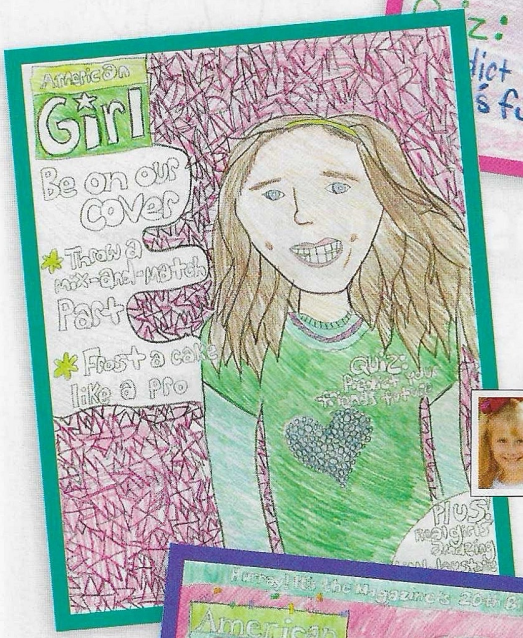
food-safe stick

Warm chewy candy in your hands, and then sculpt it as you would with clay.

AG Art Gallery

These artists drew our 20th-birthday cover. Thanks for helping us celebrate a great year!

Hurray! It's the Magazine's 20th B-day!
American Girl
Celebrating 20 years of fun!
Reader Contest:
Be on our Cover!
Throw a mix-and-match party!!!
Frost a cake like a pro!!!
Plus! Real girls' amazing birthday stories



Rianne I.
Age 9, California

Jenna G.
Age 12, Missouri

Lizzy H.
Age 11, California

Help us fill our gallery! Send color copies of your **original artwork** or **photos** to the address on page 7. Sorry, we can't return entries.

Creative Corner

Cut out card. Flip over for directions.

AG Poll

Answer these questions, and then turn the page to see how your answers compare to those of other AG readers.

On your cell phone, the first thing you do is...

* check e-mail.
* send a text.
* play a game.
* take a picture.

If you were picked to be on a magazine cover, you'd be excited to...

* flash your best smile.
* try out fun poses.
* try on cute clothes.
* have your hair styled.

Wrap It Up

This clever gift box looks like a gift bag. Cut the flaps off one end of an **empty food box,** and punch holes for handles. **Wrap** the box as you would a gift, but leave the open end untaped. Tuck the extra paper inside the box, and **tape** down. Punch holes in the paper where the box's holes are, and then knot **ribbons** to make handles.

AG Poll

What girls told us

The thing girls do first with their cell phones is

41% play a game.

33% send a text.

17% check e-mail.

9% take a picture.

If girls were picked to be on a magazine cover, they'd be excited to

45% try on cute clothes.

30% have their hair styled.

13% flash their smiles.

12% try out fun poses.

To answer our weekly poll question, go to americangirl.com/playmagazine

Mini Quiz

Your Inner Elf

Which elf's outfit best matches your personality? Take our jolly quiz to find out.

1. If you were a bird, you'd be
- **a.** a quick and clever owl.
- **b.** a colorful and inspiring peacock.
- **c.** an exciting and powerful eagle.

2. If you were a game, you'd be
- **a.** a card game in which you can't let others know your hand.
- **b.** a drawing game in which you need great sketches to win.
- **c.** a challenge game in which players get one another to try new things.

3. If you were a treat, you'd be
- **a.** a chocolate-covered cherry—there's a surprise inside!
- **b.** a nut brittle—sweet and salty, a perfect combination.
- **c.** an everything sundae—no flavor left behind!

4. If you were a necklace, you'd be

a. b. c.

Answers

Mostly a's

Mysterious Elf

The other elves can't always tell what you're thinking. But they know it's always something very, very interesting.

Mostly b's

Creative Elf

The other elves can always count on you for awesome ideas, and they admire your incredible imagination.

Mostly c's

Adventurous Elf

The other elves know that you're the bravest and the most curious, an elf who always goes for it.

True Story

Erika got to see her name in a movie's credits!

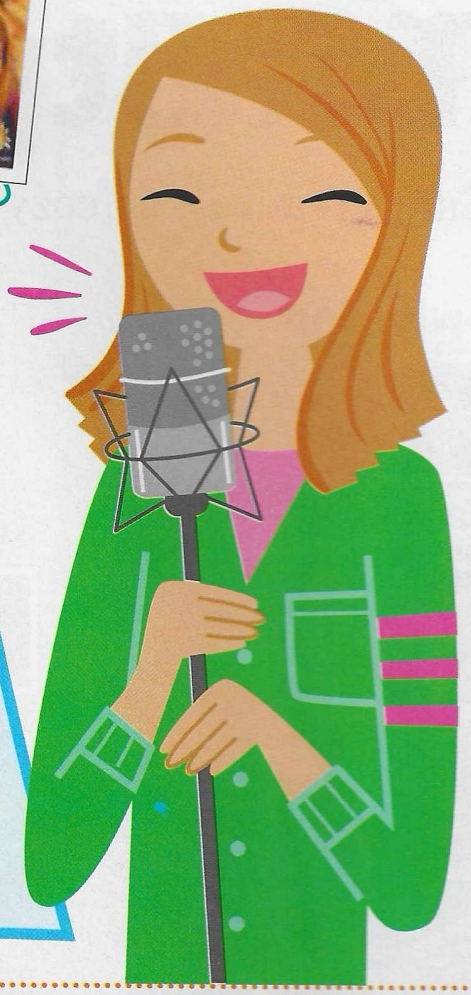
Dear American Girl,

I've been singing in a children's choir for as long as I can remember. Last year, a music composer heard me sing. He liked my voice and asked if I'd like to record a song for a movie as a backup singer. I loved the idea. The composer gave me two holiday songs to memorize.

Two weeks later, my mom, my grandparents, and I headed to the recording studio. It was in an office building. At first I was nervous. I felt awkward just going into the sound booth and singing with no choir. It was so quiet in there! But I did it. Walking out of the studio that day, I felt important and very, very happy. My family and I celebrated by going out for hamburgers.

After the movie was finished, my dad and I went to the movie studio to watch a special screening. When I heard the songs during the movie, I hardly recognized my own voice. But my name was in the credits! Even though only my voice was in the movie, seeing my name up on the screen made me feel like a movie star.

Sincerely,
Erika T.
Age 11, California



Write to Us

Be sure to include your

- **First and last name**
- **Address and phone number**
- **Birth date, including year**
- **School photo or other portrait**
- **Parent's signature**

Send us a cool envelope! Print our address neatly on the front and your return address on the back.

We can't print every letter, but we read everything you send to us. Hope to hear from you soon! ★

Envelope art by
Mary L.
Age 11, Georgia

Toasty Toppers

Cute, creative, and cozy—hats off to you for your great designs, girls!

Swim Cap

Abby F.
Age 12, Idaho

Snow Tunes

Aidan W.
Age 11, Florida

Hat's Meow

Lauren M.
Age 8, Virginia

Blizzard Lid

Kaiya C.
Age 9, Colorado

Brain Freeze

Joi F.
Age 9, Maryland

Roar Head

Regan K.
Age 10, Michigan

Illustrations: Lauren Scheuer

New Contest: Unique Earrings

Dream up a pair of never-before-seen earrings that you'd love to wear. Follow the instructions on page 7 for sending in your drawing. Postmark deadline: December 10, 2013. Winners will appear in the May/June 2014 issue. Sorry—we can't return entries. ★

Gifts

Take a peek at readers' votes—and their best, worst, and dream gifts, too.

Best:

You would rather...

get one gift that will last forever:

98%

get 1,000 gifts that will disappear after one day: **2%**

finish your gift shopping the day before the holiday:

51%

shop in July: **49%**

wrap presents in tie-dyed wrapping paper:

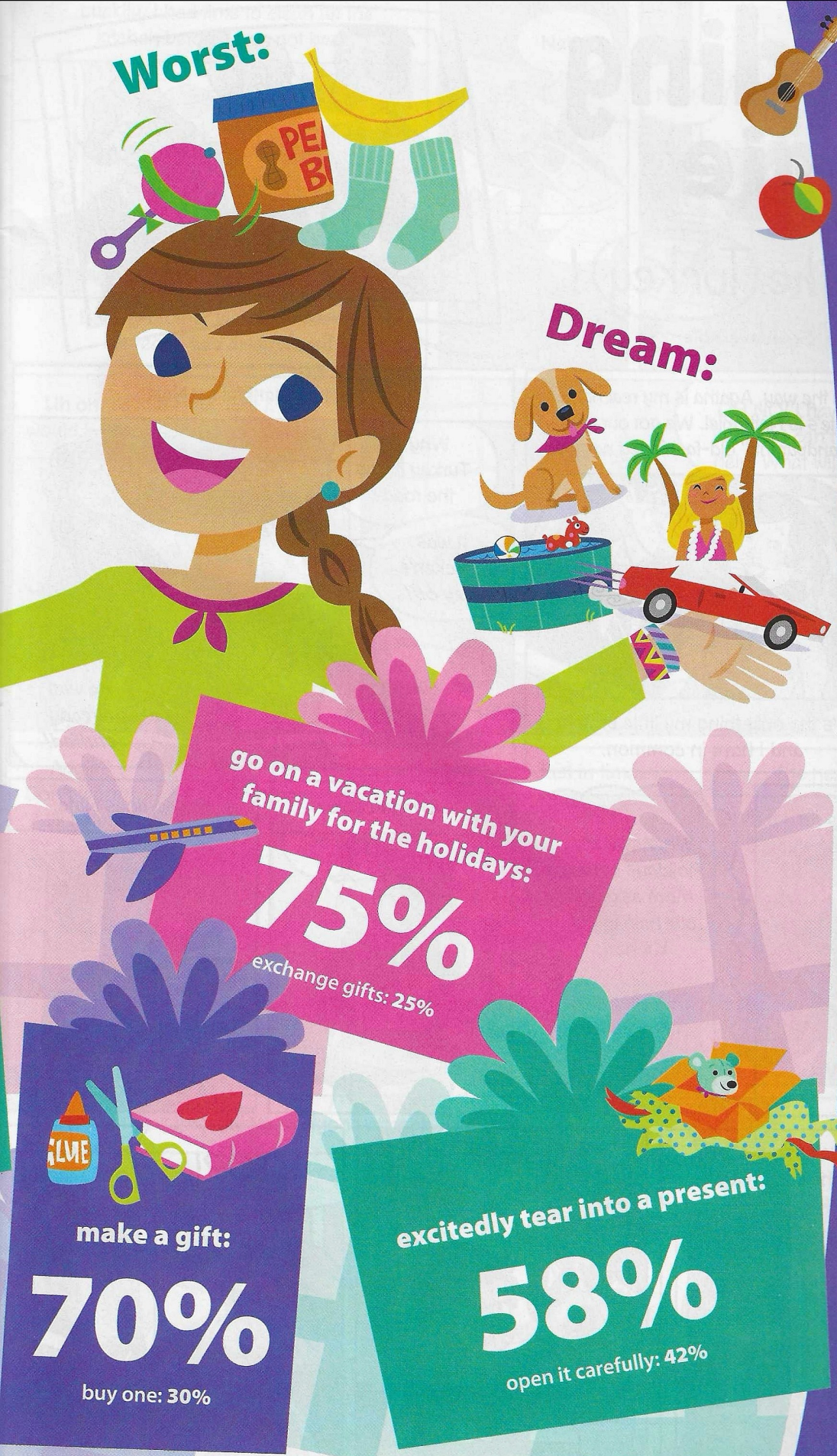
78%

wrap them in faux fur: **22%**

receive a gift card:

71%

get a cute outfit from a favorite store: **29%**



Coming Up: After School

1. What is the first thing you do when you get home from school?
   a. Have a snack
   b. Do homework
   c. Talk to a friend
   d. Practice something (such as music)
   e. Get on the computer
   f. Watch TV

2. What is your favorite after-school activity?

3. Do you partcipate in any sports?
   YES (tell us which ones)
   or
   NO

4. If you and your friends started an after-school club, what would it be about and why?

5. Pretend that you can do one of these fantasy activities and be back in time for school the next day. You'd love to
   a. travel to Paris and eat chocolate crêpes.
   b. go to the Caribbean and swim with dolphins.
   c. voyage to the Alps and ski down snowy mountains.
   d. fly to New York for a shopping spree.
   e. journey to Africa to go on a safari.

Send your answers to the address on page 7, along with your first and last name, address, school or portrait-style photo, and birth date. Postmark deadline: December 10, 2013. Some answers will appear in the May/June 2014 issue. ★

According to Aggie™

My Brother the Turkey!

by Laura Dower and Genevieve Kote

Every Thanksgiving, my family gives thanks for the people we love.

I'm thankful for Mom, Dad, Gram, and Peking, my cat.

Purrr! I'm thankful for you, too, Agatha.

By the way, Agatha is my real name. Nate's is Nathaniel. We got our great-grandparents' old-fashioned names.

It's the only thing my little brother and I have in common.

I'm not so thankful for Nate.

Why did Turkey cross the road?

It was Chicken's *day off!*

Why wasn't Turkey hungry on Thanksgiving?

He was already *stuffed!*

Nate, quit it! Your jokes are putting me in a fowl ... er, a foul mood!

Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha

Sometimes I wish the little turkey would just disappear!

Whenever the holidays come, Mom asks for our help in the kitchen.

This year, she made us her co-chefs.

I love to cook.

But so does Nate.

Wednesday, in the middle of mixing, we ran out of milk. Dad was at work. Mom was going to the supermarket.

I'll be back in a little bit.

You're leaving me in charge?

STOP!

You can't stop meeee!

Luckily, I had time to clean up the kitchen before Mom got back.

Nate?

But my brother was still missing. He really *had* disappeared.

Nate?

Nate?

Nate? Nate, where did you go? NAAAAATE!?

Uh oh. I'd lost Nate, and Mom would be back soon. I got an idea.

!!

OH NO! I have to finish cooking, but I just can't do it without Nate's help! What will I do? WHAAAT?!?

Aggie? Don't worry! I'll help.

I knew he'd come back. Just in time.

I'm sorry.

Me, too.

The next day...

What happened when Dracula came over for dinner?

We had a Happy *Fangs*-giving!

Turns out I was thankful for everyone after all, even Nate.

And the little turkey was thankful for me, too.

Don't miss my next misadventure:

THE SNOW MUST GO ON

It'll be *brrr*illiant!

Holiday Head to Toe

'Tis the season to shine! Add holiday spirit to your style with fun fashion crafts.

Bow Band

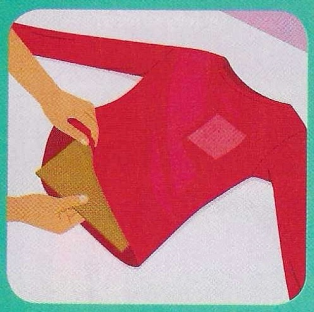
Change up a headband! Start with a fleece or knit headband. Pinch the headband at the top and wrap the pinched section a few times with sequin trim. (You may need another set of hands to pinch the headband while you wrap.) Cut the trim, and tie the loose ends in a double-knot on the underside of the headband. Use scissors to trim any excess.

Festive Fringe

Make a no-sew cowl. Cut a rectangle of fleece fabric that's 32 inches long and 16 inches wide. Fold the rectangle in half lengthwise. Then fold it in half widthwise, bringing the short ends together. Use scissors to cut 5-inch-long slits along the short edges. Knot the top 2 layers of fringe to the bottom 2 layers. To wear, slip it over your head.

O Christmas Tee

Trim a tee with shiny sequins!



1. Lay a plain T-shirt on a covered work surface. Place a piece of cardboard between the 2 layers of T-shirt fabric.

2. Cut a piece of sequin trim that's long enough to line the shirt's collar all the way around, front and back.

3. Starting on the front of the shirt, draw a line of fabric glue along the T-shirt's collar. Place the sequin trim on top of the glue. Let dry.

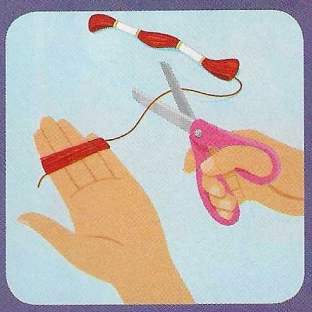
4. Repeat step 3 on the back of the shirt. Let dry. You can also add sequin trim to other spots, such as the shirt's pocket.

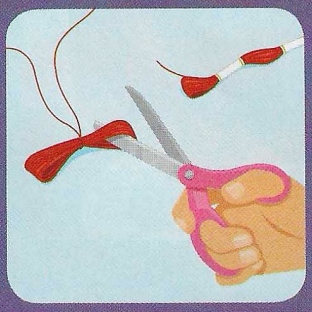
Note: Shirts with sequin trim cannot go in the washing machine.

Styling: Ashley Franklin Illustrations: Monika Roe

Tiny Tassel

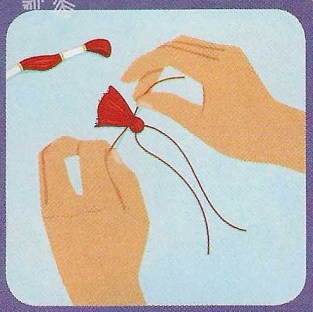
Add a bright accent to a clutch, pencil case, or key chain!





1. Wrap a piece of embroidery floss around your fingers about 20 times and cut the end loose.

2. Remove the loop from your fingers, and double-knot a 5-inch piece of floss around the center. (You'll use the two long pieces to attach the tassel to a clutch.) Snip the loops with scissors.



3. Fold the strands in half. Wrap an 8-inch piece of floss a few times around the strands and double-knot. Trim excess.

Sparkle Shoes

Here's a quick way to add style to your shoes: Use rhinestone letter stickers to spell a holiday word on the back of each heel.

Ruffle Skirt

An everyday skirt becomes a special-occasion style with this easy addition.

1. Start with a piece of ¾-inch-wide elastic that's long enough to tie comfortably around your waist.

2. Measure the skirt, from waistband to hem, and double this number. Add 12 inches. This is how long the tulle strips should be. Cut 15 to 20 strips from a 6-inch-wide roll of tulle.

3. Fasten the tulle strips to the elastic: Fold a strip in half and lay the loop on top of the elastic. Bring the ends of the tulle under the elastic and through the loop.

4. Pull down tightly, making sure the ends are even. Repeat until the elastic band is nearly full. (Be sure to leave a few inches of elastic on each end to tie it.)

5. If necessary, trim the bottom of the tulle skirt to make it even. Tie the tulle skirt around your waist with the knot in back. Put your outer skirt over the tulle skirt. A few inches of tulle should stick out the bottom.

Glove Gems

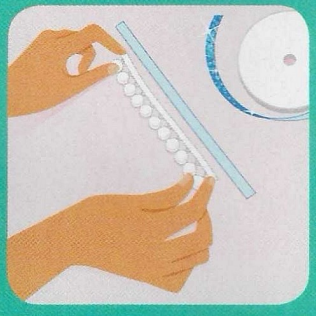
Add "rings" to your gloves. Lay a pair of stretchy winter gloves on a covered work surface. Slide a wooden craft stick in the glove's finger where you'll attach the decoration. Use fabric glue to attach a sparkly pompom to the base of the finger. Hold the pompom in place with a clothespin while it dries. Let dry completely.

Ear Bling

Turn everyday earrings into holiday accessories. First, cut tiny shapes out of stiff felt. (Try triangles for trees and squares for presents.) Use a stud earring to make a hole in each felt shape. Then slide the shapes on the earrings. Now they're ready to wear!

Snowball Bracelet

Decorate your wrist with a pompom garland!



1. Cut a piece of pompom trim that's nearly long enough to wrap around your wrist. Then cut a piece of glittery ribbon that's 2 inches longer than the trim and place it glitter-side down.

2. Center the pompom trim on the ribbon and attach it using craft glue. Use clothespins to hold the trim and ribbon together while the glue dries.

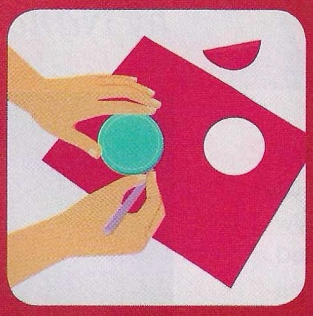
3. Attach an adhesive-backed Velcro® brand hook-and-loop fastener to each end of the ribbon. Wrap around your wrist and fasten.

Hair Flair

Add a sparkly accent to your hairstyle. Start with a plastic headband. Attach a glittery foam shape (such as a star or snowflake) to the side with craft glue. Let dry.

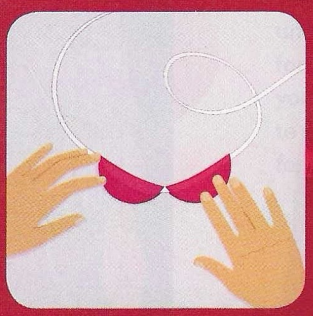
Cool Jewels

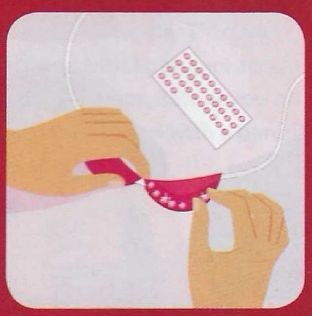
Top a holiday outfit with a collar necklace.



1. Cut out 2 circles from a sheet of adhesive-backed felt. (The circles should be about 4 inches in diameter. Trace around a lid for a perfect circle.) Fold each circle in half to make a crease in each one.

2. Next, cut a 12-inch piece of ribbon. Remove the paper backing from one circle. Fold the circle over the ribbon (with the ribbon in the crease), close to the middle of the ribbon. The two halves of the circle will stick to each other.





3. Repeat step 2 with the second circle, placing the second circle next to the first one.

4. Decorate the felt collar with rhinestone stickers. Make a design or cover the collar with strips of rhinestone stickers. ★

Shopping Smarts

This time of year, shopping malls are extra lively. Whether you're with a parent or exploring with your friends, here's how to navigate the mall madness.

by Nancy Holyoke

Store Savvy

- When you're in a store, treat it as you would a friend's home. Put things back where you found them, and try not to make a big mess.
- If you need to make a phone call or have a conversation with a friend, step outside the store or speak in a quiet voice.
- Don't talk on the phone (or text!) while a store employee is helping you.

Elevators

Let people get off before you try to get on. If older people or parents with babies are waiting, hold the door and let them on first. When getting off an elevator, the people closest to the door go first.

Escalators

Sometimes other shoppers will be in a bigger hurry than you. For example, a woman who's just remembered that she left her wallet in a store may try to pass you on the escalator. Step to the right and give her space if you can. Someday you might be the one in a hurry!

Doors

- Hold doors open for older people, people carrying packages, parents with babies, and other people who look as if they could use a hand.
- Always check to see if there's someone behind you before letting a door close.
- Revolving doors are fun! But don't goof around with them or doors that open automatically. One wrong step could result in an injury.
- Saying thanks is a way to return the kindness when someone holds a door for you.

Shopping Safety

- Stick together. Shopping's more fun when you have other people with you. Don't ditch your friends (or parents) just because you want to visit a different store. Instead, ask if you can go there together next.
- A little chitchat is natural with strangers to whom you have a reason to talk—such as a store clerk. But these conversations should be brief and stick to whatever it is you're doing. Don't tell a stranger your name or where you live or go to school.
- Manners aside, you never have to stay in a situation that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable. This goes for interactions with strangers and for your friends' behavior. Before you go to the mall, make a plan with a parent for how to stay safe. ★

More advice can be found in *A Smart Girl's Guide: Manners.*

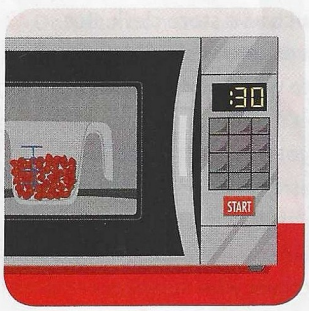
Illustrations: Julia Bereciartu

Cocoa Cubes

These little cubes become hot cocoa when you melt them in milk. Create different flavors to give as gifts!

YOU WILL NEED

- an adult to help you
- baking chips in assorted flavors
- toppings
- silicone ice cube tray
- toothpicks



1. Ask an adult to microwave 2 cups of baking chips for 30 seconds at a time until melted. Have the adult remove the melted chocolate from the microwave.

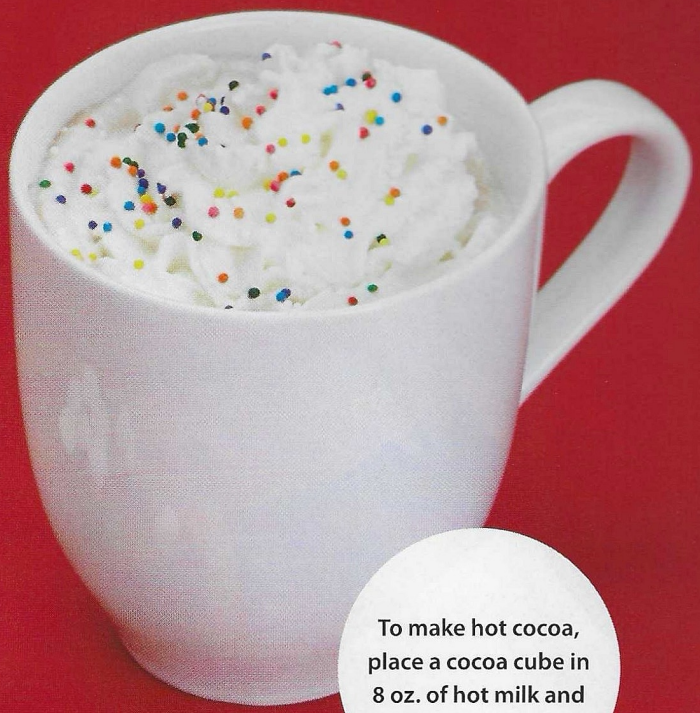
2. Stir the melted chocolate until it's smooth. Use a teaspoon to fill the ice cube tray with chocolate. Each cup should be almost full.

3. Add toppings to each cube. (The toppings you use should be able to melt in hot cocoa, such as crushed candy or marshmallows.) Let chocolate harden.

4. Once the chocolate hardens, you can remove the chocolate cubes from their molds. Wrap a few in a plastic bag and tie with a ribbon.
Note: Make sure to give away your cocoa cubes within a day or so. That's when they'll look best!

Mix up these flavor combos:

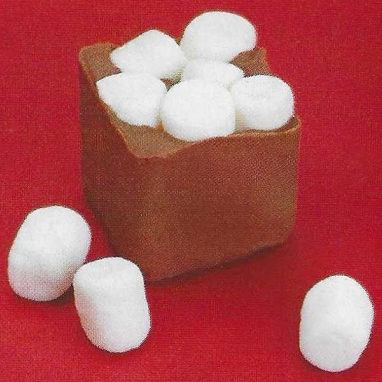
Tip: Try two flavors together! Melt the flavors separately, then put a little of each in each cup.



To make hot cocoa, place a cocoa cube in 8 oz. of hot milk and stir until melted.

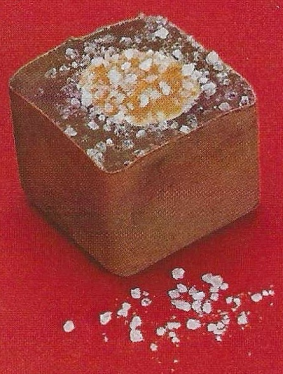
Classic Cocoa

- Milk chocolate chips
- Mini marshmallows



Salted Caramel

- Dark chocolate chips
- Caramel-flavored chips
- Salt

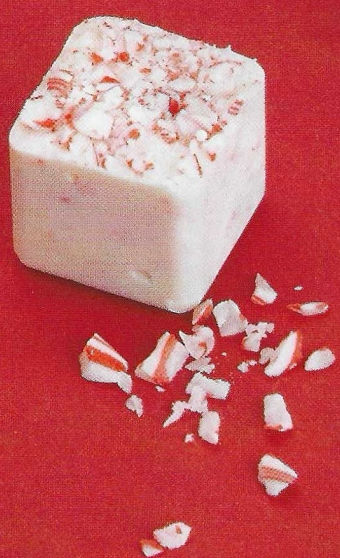


Cinnamon Chocolate

- Semisweet chocolate chips
- Cinnamon-flavored chips
- Candy sprinkles

Peppermint

- White-chocolate chips
- Crushed peppermint candy

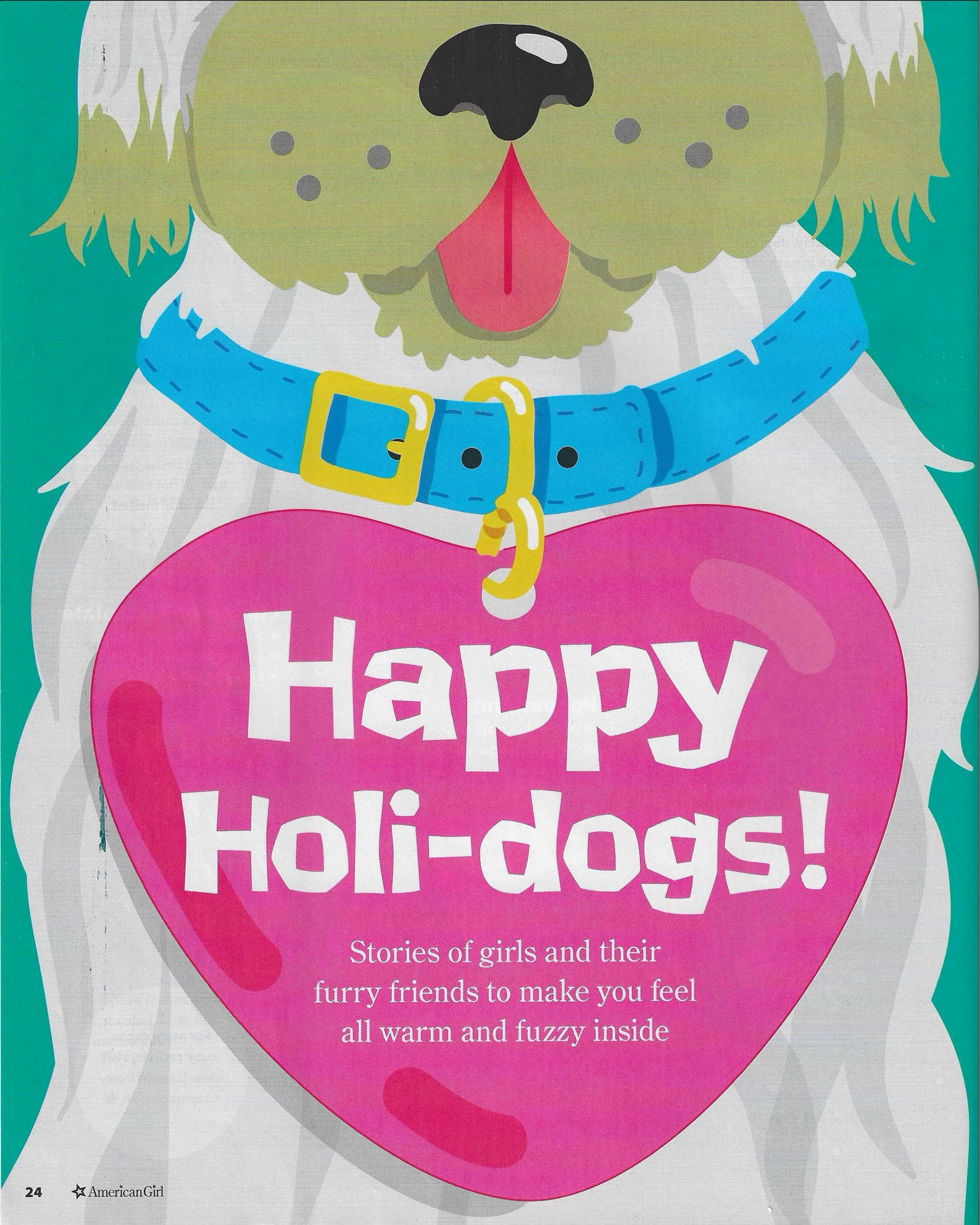


Chocolate-Covered Cherry

- Dark chocolate chips
- Cherry-flavored chips
- Rainbow sprinkles

For more cocoa cube recipes, visit **americangirl.com/playmagazine** ★

Illustrations: Monika Roe


Happy Holi-dogs!
Stories of girls and their furry friends to make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside

Ava:

Our blind dog got lost but came home for Christmas!

My dog, Abby, has been in our family since before I was born. My brothers and I run around and play with her, and she can do tricks. I love to pet her, brush her, and help feed her. She loves to lick my face. My family got her as a puppy from an animal shelter a long time ago. About three years ago, she went blind. She's a great dog, but she can't see a thing.

That's why we were so worried when she disappeared. It was super cold, foggy, and snowy in Alaska ten days before Christmas. It was like Abby vanished right into the two feet of snow on the ground. We looked everywhere. It seemed like we'd never find her. When the temperature dropped to minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit, I imagined her out there freezing, lonely, and lost.

It turns out that Abby's a pretty smart dog, even if her eyes don't work. On Christmas Eve, my family got a phone call. Abby had wandered ten miles away. But she sniffed her way through the snow to a house where a nice man took her in. Somehow her ears and toes hadn't frozen in the cold. With help from neighbors, the man figured out where Abby lived. We went and got her right away.

Getting Abby back was the most amazing Christmas gift I could ever ask for. Abby got a present, too: a fleecy pink coat to wear so that she'll never be cold again.

Illustrations: Janell Genovese

Emerson & Cadence:

We got a million "likes" and a dog!

After our dog died last summer, we wanted a puppy—badly. But our parents wanted to wait. How could we convince them to get a puppy sooner rather than later?

We saw a picture online about a boy and a girl who had convinced their parents to get a cat if they got 10,000 likes on a well-known social media site. It worked! We asked our dad if he would let us get a puppy if we posted a photo and got a million likes. He said sure but didn't think we had a chance. Boy, was he wrong!

We made a poster asking the world to help by liking it. Our mom took a picture of us with our sign and posted it online. By the time we went to bed, we had 10,000 likes.

My dad woke us up at midnight. We'd gotten over a million likes! We were shocked and super happy. Three days later, we found Millie at an animal shelter near our home in Massachusetts. It was hard to choose which puppy we wanted. But Millie (short for million) is very calm and a good fit for a family with five kids. Oh, and did we mention how cute she is? She's very playful and loves to cuddle.

We take her for walks and play with her. We also help feed and groom her. She's going to be a big dog, so we're teaching her "sit," "stay," and "come." We love her times one million.

Eleanor:

I raised a mountain of money to help local dogs!

I fall in love with every pet I see. To me, they are family. They depend on us. When I found out that thousands of homeless pets are put to sleep every year in my Texas hometown alone, I felt sick. I knew I needed to help.

That's when I started a charity to raise money to help animals. I collect money for my local animal shelter. It's hard, like sometimes when I stand for six hours in the hot sun with my donation jar. It's hard when people say no. But a lot of people say yes, too. It feels good to help animals. Even a small person can make a difference. I've raised more than $17,200. Every penny helps give homeless animals a second chance.

Helping animals has always been a big part of my family's life. I've been visiting and volunteering at the shelter since before I could walk. I've exercised dogs, groomed them, cleaned up after them, and comforted them when they were sick or dying. We foster dogs in our home. But sometimes we end up keeping them, like my dogs Brodi, Mac, and Gus.

My friends help, too. For my ninth and tenth birthdays, they donated pet supplies instead of birthday presents. My friend Jackie earned $42 with a lemonade stand and donated it to my charity. My mom helps, too, driving me around to community events so that I can collect money. I feel a lot closer to her because we have so much fun going out and doing this together. Whatever has fur and four legs, we love to help it.

Mia:
My dog was stolen on Christmas Eve!

Nothing is sweeter than my dog, Marley. He snuggles with me at night and gives me kisses every morning. He gets sad when I leave for school. But he's always there waiting when I get home, ready to go for a walk or play a game of fetch.

Last year on Christmas Eve, Marley walked with my family and me to a market in our New York neighborhood. My mom tied him up outside. When we came out of the store just a little while later, Marley was gone. My mom called the police to report that he had been stolen. We couldn't find him anywhere. I was very, very sad. It was the worst Christmas Eve ever.

That night, I didn't sleep well. My cat seemed to know I was sad and cuddled to make me feel better. On Christmas morning, I woke up and called for Marley. Then I remembered. He was gone.

Even though it was Christmas, I didn't want presents. I didn't want anything, except my furry friend. Nothing could ever replace Marley.

Then my mom got a phone call. Someone had found him! A nice woman had seen a man on the street trying to sell a scared dog. She felt bad for the dog and used her own money (more than $200!) to buy him. She took him to a veterinarian. The vet scanned the dog for a microchip that would give his identification. The vet found our number and called my mom.

I was so excited when I saw Marley. He was wagging his tail and seemed excited, too. I am so grateful to that woman. She's my hero. We'll never leave Marley tied outside a store again. Getting him back was the best Christmas present ever. ★

Free Gifts

These ideas don't cost a penny, but they add up to plenty of holiday cheer.

1. Merry Morning

Dress up your family's breakfast table with a holiday flair. Make some decorations, such as a paper tree for a centerpiece and place cards for each family member. Be sneaky and put out the decorations before your family wakes up. You'll make an everyday breakfast a lot more special.

2. Season's Readings

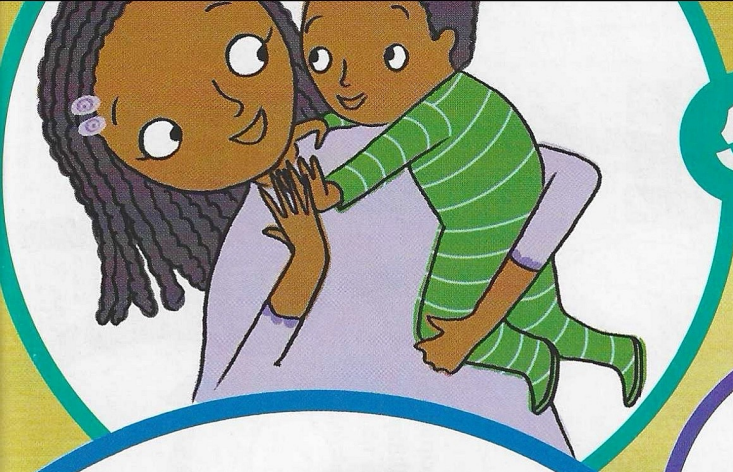
At a holiday party, gather up the little kids to read to them. Pick a favorite holiday book—it'll be fun to read it to kids who may have never heard it before.

3. Tree Spree

Hold an ornament-making contest with your siblings or friends. Ask a parent if you can collect objects or materials from around the house, such as pieces of old flannel, cookie cutters, and ribbon. Set a timer for three minutes. A judge will choose a winner, and she'll get to keep her favorite ornament from the bunch.

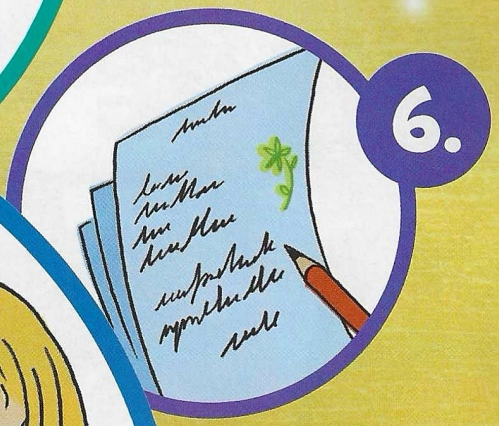
4. On with the Snow

Make up a holiday play and perform it for family and friends. Instead of charging admission, ask audience members to bring canned goods, toys, or coats to donate to a charity.



5. Helpful Elf

Since the holidays can be super busy, provide free babysitting to parents who need to shop or get ready for a party. Watch holiday movies with the kids or play games in the backyard. You'll give parents the gift of time!



6. Winter Word-erland

Write stories or poems to give to people you love. Your words might mean a lot more to them than store-bought gifts ever could.

7. Not-So-Silent Night

Invite pals to a heartwarming slumber party. Ask each girl to bring craft supplies from home, such as scrapbook paper, markers, and glue. Spend the evening making cards together. Then send them to people who could use a little extra cheer, such as nursing-home residents or US soldiers.

8. Festive Feast

Ask a parent if you can help out with the holiday meal. Make a yummy appetizer or ask Grandma to teach you how to make her famous pumpkin pie.

9. Wrap It Up

Wrapping gifts can be a chance to show off your creativity, so why not offer to help a younger sibling or an elderly neighbor with her gift wrapping? It'll be really helpful, and by the time you're finished, you just might be a pro at making perfect bows.

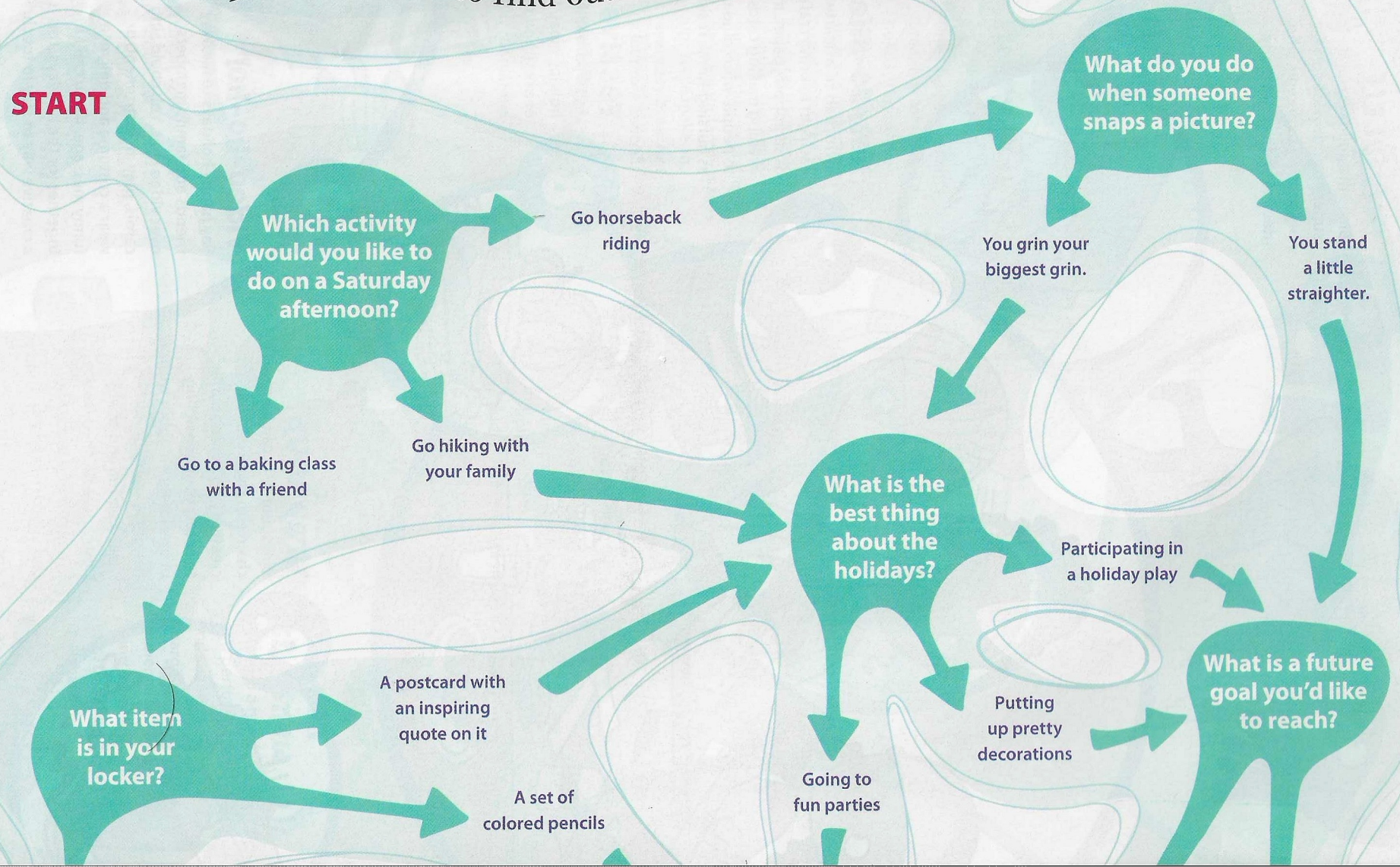
10. Video-ho-ho!

Say happy holidays to faraway friends and family members over video chat. You could sing carols, play an instrument, or wear a costume and deliver a funny message. If you can't be together for the holidays, this is a creative way to stay in touch.

Illustrations: Josée Masse

Sweet Dreams

Which fantasy gingerbread house matches your personality? Take this quiz to find out.


START
Which activity would you like to do on a Saturday afternoon?
Go horseback riding
Go to a baking class with a friend
Go hiking with your family
What do you do when someone snaps a picture?
You grin your biggest grin.
You stand a little straighter.
What is the best thing about the holidays?
Participating in a holiday play
Going to fun parties
Putting up pretty decorations
What item is in your locker?
A postcard with an inspiring quote on it
A set of colored pencils
What is a future goal you'd like to reach?

A sweatshirt

Which season do you prefer?

Summer

Winter

How would you describe yourself?

Running a marathon

Writing a book

I have a soft spot for animals.

I love to try new things.

I'm the first to stick up for someone.

Candy Cabin

You're a warm, caring girl who loves to be comfy and cozy, especially with pals or pets. So why don't you settle into a gingerbread chair, sip some hot cocoa, and watch the skiers glide down Mount Frosting?

Beach Treat

With your colorful, adventurous personality, you'd be right at home in the tropics. After climbing to the top of a volcano (using licorice ropes, of course), you'll go back to your snack shack and lie in a hammock between two gummy palm trees.

Cookie Castle

You're bold, you're spirited, and you stand up for what you believe in. In your tasty tower, you'll look out and see lollipop forests and chocolate rivers across the land. And you'll wear a crown covered with jelly-bean "jewels." Sweet! ★

Illustrations: Monika Roe

Set a Fancy Table

If you have a special dinner coming up, ask to be in charge of designing the table. Then work your magic!

Place

Traditionally, every piece at a table has a proper spot. Diners usually use the silverware farthest from the plate first. Because salad is often served at the start of a special meal, the salad fork sits farthest to the left.

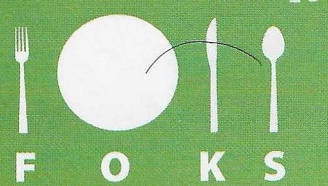
Some meals require more or fewer utensils and plates than you see here. Ask whoever is cooking for advice about what is needed at each place.

Place card
Make one of these for each guest.
Glass
The glass should sit above the plate and knife.
Bella
Knife
Sharp side always points toward the plate.
Dinner fork
That's the larger one, if you have two sizes.
Dinner plate
Salad plate
The smaller salad plate can sit on top of the dinner plate.
Teaspoon
That's the small spoon.
Napkin
Folded to the left of the forks
Salad fork
That's the smaller one.

Remember

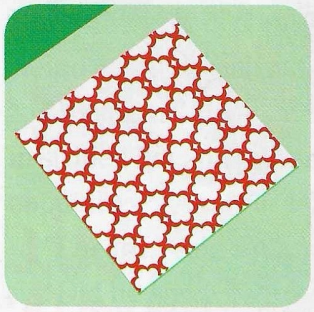
Here's an easy way to remind yourself where everything goes: Imagine the word "forks."

R Drinks go to the right.

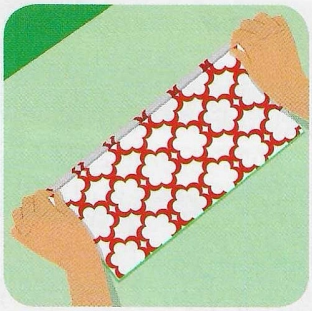


Napkins

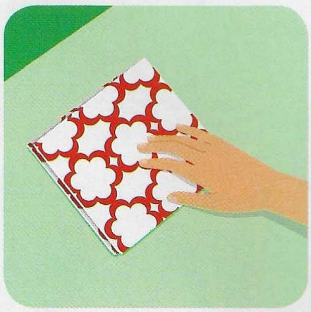
Here's a fancy way to fold a napkin:



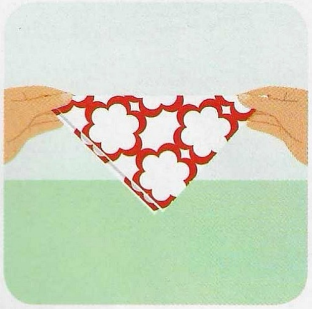
1. Place napkin facedown.



2. Fold into a rectangle.



3. Fold into a square.



4. Fold into a triangle.

Centerpieces

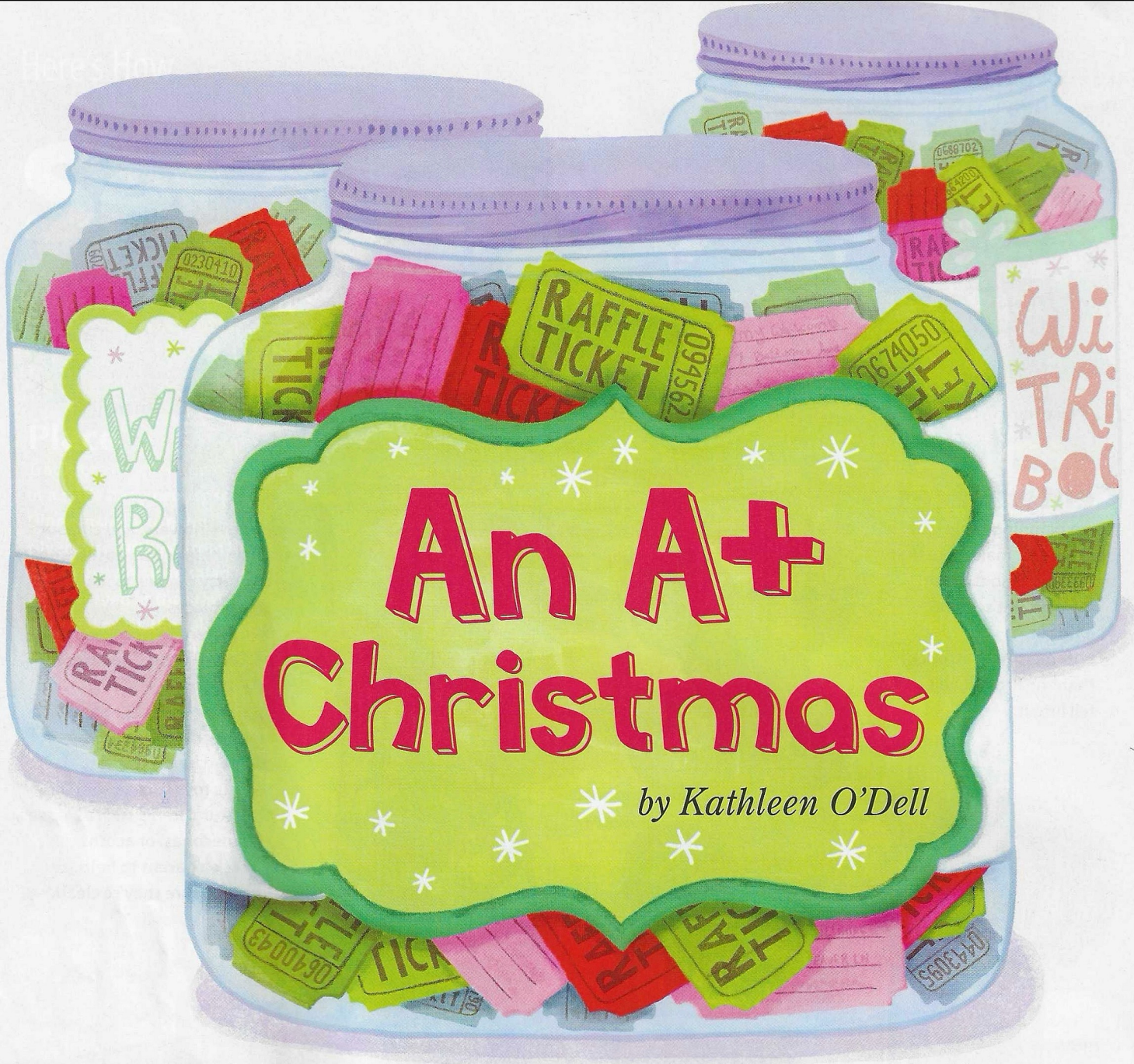
When planning table decorations, make sure that

- nothing is so tall that guests can't see one another.
- nothing smells stronger than the food or will fall into it.

Besides flowers, you can put lots of things into vases, bowls, or pretty glasses to make centerpieces.

- Candy
- Colorful shredded paper
- Pompoms
- Ornaments or garlands
- Curly ribbon or gift bows
- Dried beans or pasta
- Tiny toys such as dreidels
- Natural items such as leaves, pinecones, or acorns (Ask a parent to help you make sure they're clean.)

Illustrations: Monika Roe



An A+ Christmas

by Kathleen O'Dell

Holly wants to give her best friend a special present at Christmas. But is a gift worth more than their friendship?

Holly Dalton and her best friend, Emma Hart, had always shared a love of Christmas. Over the years, they even kept their own traditions—like building the season's first snowman together or taking the long way home from school together to gaze at the lights on the neighborhood houses. But the friends' favorite tradition of all was "Cookie-palooza," the Christmas-cookie baking party that the girls took turns hosting every second weekend in December.

Although the girls had different teachers this year, they still caught up at the flagpole in front of the school every day to walk home together. Emma

usually got to the flagpole first; but sometime during November, Emma had slowed—walking, Holly thought, as if she was carrying something weighty in her backpack.

"Hey, Em," Holly cried, when she spotted Emma in striped hat and mittens, "did Mr. Linton tell you about the PTA raffle? For a week at Boulder Pines?"

"I heard," said Emma.

"Did he show how they decorated the lodge? With that twelve-foot tree? It looks like someplace Santa and the elves would live." Holly rubbed her hands together. "I wish I could buy a zillion tickets."

"Mr. Linton told us that only adults are supposed to buy them."

"I know," said Holly. "Still, I'm hoping my mom and my grandparents will buy a couple. They'd bring me with them if they won."

Emma dropped her backpack with a thud and pulled her ticket booklet from a side pocket. "Here. Take mine."

"Why? Don't you want them?"

She bit her lip. "I don't think my parents will want to enter."

"Have your dad sell them at work," Holly said. "My mom buys things from other people's kids at her office all the time."

Emma stuffed the tickets back in her backpack, slipped her arms again through the straps, and groaned. "Guess we'd better get walking."

"Poor thing," Holly said. "Accordion lessons today, huh?"

"I forgot to tell you," Emma replied with a sideways glance. "This is my last lesson."

"Really? Your dad let you quit? I thought it was his dream to play duets with you!"

But Emma didn't answer. She was so quiet on the way home, in fact, that Holly did the talking for both of them. When they reached Emma's house, Holly spotted Mr. Hart's car out front. "Gee, seems your dad is home early a lot lately."

"No," Emma said. "He's not home early." She glanced over her shoulder for a moment at the house. When she looked back, Holly saw that Emma's eyes were wet.

"Oh, Em. What's wrong?"

"My dad was laid off," she said softly. "And . . . we aren't spending money on things that we don't absolutely have to. But my mom still has her job, and she says we will be OK if Dad finds a new one soon." She blotted her eyes on her coat sleeve. "See you tomorrow."

Holly stood openmouthed as Emma trudged down her driveway. She wasn't sure how long Mr. Hart had been out of work. It might have been over a week by now. But why didn't Emma say anything?

As soon as she reached home, Holly ran to the den and told her mother all about Mr. Hart. "And he even had Emma quit accordion lessons!" she said.

"But I thought Emma hated accordion lessons," said Mrs. Dalton.

Illustrations: Jennifer Kalis

"She does! But she's not happy about quitting. And that is just weird, because she's been wishing she could stop for two years."

"Well, sometimes you feel better when you get what you want if it's your own idea. Do you know what I mean?"

"I do," Holly said. "But that's probably because I have a lot of good ideas."

"My client is certainly hoping I come up with some," Mrs. Dalton said, staring at the fabric samples dotting her computer screen. "Anyway, that's too bad about Emma's dad. And right before Christmas. That's got to be tough." She gave Holly a pat on the arm. "Why don't you make a snack and we'll talk more after I finish up?"

Holly left in a daze. This was the first time she considered what would happen to Emma's family at Christmas. If the Harts were as worried as Emma seemed to be, their holiday might not be all that merry.

Kyle, Holly's little brother, stopped stirring his chocolate milk as he saw her come into the kitchen. "You in trouble?" he asked.

"No, I'm just feeling sort of bluh." She reached into an upper cupboard for a granola bar, and when she closed it, there was Kyle, wide-eyed and pointing toward the kitchen window.

Holly turned, and her spirits lifted. Here and there, tiny white flakes floated lazily from the sky. Soon she would be making the first snowman with Emma—a sure sign that Christmas was near. She thought of the picture Mrs. Bunce showed today of the Lodge at Boulder Pines, with its stone and timber walls, snowdrifts, and firelight and . . . *Oh my gosh!*

"Kyle," announced Holly, "I just figured out what I'm giving Emma for Christmas."

"What's that?" he asked.

She grabbed an empty jar from the pantry and held it up. "I'm giving her Christmas for Christmas!" she said, and skipped off to her room to sit down at her desk, open her notebook and write.

Dear Mrs. Bunce:

I have a great idea. While we are selling raffle tickets, why don't we ask people to buy one extra for a family in need? I can decorate some jars, and we can put all the stubs in there for the special family before we add them to the drawing. We could even compete against Mr. Linton's class to see who sells the most. That would not only give the family a better chance to win, but it would also help our school sell more tickets. Please, please can we do it?

Sincerely,
Holly Dalton

P.S. I know who maybe would be a good family to give the trip to. We should find some people where the mom or dad lost a job and they don't have any money to do anything fun. We can say, "Let's give a family CHRISTMAS for Christmas!"

Holly crossed her fingers the next morning as Mrs. Bunce read her letter. "You know, you might have something here, Holly."

"Yay! And what about the family with the parent out of work? Do you agree? Because that's the most important part."

"I'll have to discuss the details with Mr. Linton. Then we'll need to get the principal on board," said Mrs. Bunce. "But if Mrs. Kroll says it's OK, and if the other students get as excited as you are, I think this could be the best winter raffle Frederick Forest Elementary School ever had."

On their way home from school that afternoon, Emma scraped fresh snow from the fence tops and packed it into little balls. "There's definitely enough here for a snowman. Our first for the year." She smiled. "Want to?"

But Holly told her that she had to work on the "Let's Give CHRISTMAS for Christmas" campaign—which she explained, except for the part where the Harts were concerned. "I'm going right now to decorate ticket jars for our classrooms. What do you think?" she asked.

"It's a cool idea," Emma said. "And smart. People buy more tickets when they have a chance to do something nice for someone else."

Holly fought to suppress a smile. *Just wait until you find out that I'm doing it all for you,* she thought.

In the end, not only did Mr. Linton agree to join the competition, but the sixth-graders also wanted to compete. All Holly had to do next was explain to Mrs. Bunce and Mr. Linton about Emma's dad before the drawing, and the vacation could turn out to be a deluxe Christmas surprise for the Harts.

Over the next few days, Holly was so eager to check the ticket count in each of the fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms that she sent Emma to walk home by herself. "Again?" asked Emma. "Aren't the teachers counting them?"

"Yes, except the ticket jars are my department. We're selling so well, I need to check and see if I need to decorate more jars to hold them all."

Watching Emma turn and walk off in the snow, Holly felt a pang. She was working so hard for her friend, but what if the Harts didn't win the vacation after all? If only we had more than one prize, she thought. Then the school could have one regular drawing and just give the second vacation to the deserving family.

Not until that evening, while Holly clicked through the TV channels, did inspiration strike. On Channel 4, she saw the weatherman, Barry Major, standing in front of a fire station with a wheelbarrow of wrapped presents for a family whose apartment had been damaged by fire.

Holly leaned in to listen. She had forgotten

that sending Barry Major out for good deeds had become a holiday practice at the station—they even gave out his e-mail address at the end of the show. What if the weatherman could persuade the people at Boulder Pines to give away another week's vacation? Or, if not, the Channel 4 crew might be convinced to sponsor the extra prize themselves.

"Pure genius!" declared Holly.

She sat at the computer, determined to write the most moving request the weatherman had ever seen. After signing her name, she looked up the principal's e-mail address in her mom's PTA parent handbook and included it for Barry Major's reply. When Mrs. Bunce received a note calling both Holly and herself to the principal's office after school a few days later, Holly was elated. Channel 4 must have come through!

"Do you know what this meeting might be about?" asked Mrs. Bunce as the other students packed for home.

"I think so. And, Mrs. Bunce, if I'm right, you are not going to believe it!" She peeked out at the hallway. "But first I gotta tell Em I won't be walking with her again. Meet you in the office?"

"Better hurry," her teacher said. "Mrs. Kroll likes people to be on time."

Holly ran to the flagpole in the swirling snow, scanning the throng of kids for a glimpse of Emma until she started to get really nervous. Finally, she asked a girl from Mr. Linton's class if she'd seen Emma around.

"She had to stay after school," the girl called over her shoulder. "Detention or something."

Detention? Holly wrinkled her nose. *That must be a mistake,* she thought. But there were few kids left to ask, and she could not wait around any longer.

Reluctantly, she ran to Mrs. Kroll's office.

Ms. Herrera, the office secretary, eyed Holly as she skidded in. "Go on inside, young lady," she said. "They're all waiting for you."

Something in Ms. Herrera's tone made Holly stop short before turning the knob on Mrs. Kroll's door. When she did open it, she heard herself gulp. Mrs. Kroll, looking unamused, sat with her hands folded on her desk. Seated before her were Mrs. Bunce, Mr. Linton . . . and Emma.

"Take a chair, Holly," said Mrs. Kroll.

"Go on inside, young lady. They're all waiting for you."

Holly tried to catch Emma's eye, but her friend only stared into her lap. "What's going on?"

"Mrs. Kroll says she heard from Channel 4," said Mrs. Bunce.

"Is that bad?" asked Holly.

The principal held up what looked like a copy of Holly's e-mail. "'Frederick Forest Elementary has been selling extra tickets for a chance to aid a family in need.' What in the world made you think you could ask Channel 4 for an extra vacation at the lodge—on behalf of our school—for your best friend?"

"B . . . but Emma's dad really did lose his job!" Holly looked to Mrs. Bunce. "That's how I came up with the whole idea about the extra tickets. I just thought we would for sure give it to Emma after I told you about her dad. Because she goes to school at Frederick Foster, and it's our drawing."

Mrs. Bunce shook her head. "Holly, we can't give the vacation to a family we choose from our own school. It wouldn't look fair. That's why Mr. Linton and I have been working with the Community Aid Society. If one of the special tickets was drawn, the society was supposed to choose."

"No one told me that," Holly said.

"The more important question," said Mrs. Kroll, "is did you tell Emma that you were going to help her family win?"

Holly gasped. "No! It was supposed to be a surprise!" She looked over at Emma, who was now covering her face with her hands.

Mr. Linton patted Emma's shoulder. "Mrs. Kroll, I honestly cannot believe that Emma had anything to do with this."

"He's right," Holly said. "It was all me. One hundred percent." She sat up straight in her chair. "And I'll do detention every day after school for the rest of the year. Only please don't blame Em."

Mrs. Kroll exchanged looks with Mr. Linton and Mrs. Bunce and sighed. "Could you girls wait outside while I talk a bit with your teachers?"

Emma stood and bolted from the room. Holly, feeling sick, followed and found her friend already sitting on a bench with her arms tightly folded.

"Em?" she said. "Aren't you going to talk to me?"

"Why should I?" Emma said sharply. "You don't listen very well."

Holly blinked a few times, not sure what to say. Her friend had never talked to her this way. "You don't understand—"

Emma held up a hand. "Before you start all your explaining, I would like to ask you a question."

"Go ahead," said Holly.

Emma fixed Holly with her dark brown eyes. "When you were planning this big surprise for my family, did you ever think that maybe I would be embarrassed by this whole thing? Like, ever?"

"Actually," Holly swallowed, "no."

"Did you think that maybe my mom and dad didn't want their problems advertised to the entire world on Channel 4 news? Or that maybe I was telling you something very private ONLY because you are my best friend?"

Holly winced. "So that was why?"

Emma took a deep breath. "We've been friends forever, Hol. So what gets me is that you should understand by now the things I love most about Christmas. Do you realize it's been blizzarding for almost two weeks, and we haven't even made our first snowman?"

"We can still do that," Holly said.

"And what about taking the long way home after school and looking at Christmas lights? It's not fun doing that by myself. It's sad."

"I know," Holly said. "I felt bad about that too."

"And the worst is, did you even remember that it's your turn to have me over for this year's Cookie-palooza?"

Holly shut her eyes tight and counted off the days. "Oh no. That's tomorrow."

"Aren't you going to talk to me?"

"Uh huh," Emma said. "And I could've reminded you, but I didn't—partly, because you've been acting so weird lately. But also because you are supposed to know! It's our friend thing. It's special. It's . . ."

"It's Christmas," Holly said, looking as if she really did just remember that today was the

thirteenth of December. "Em, I am so sorry." Holly was ashamed at the tremble in her own voice, but Emma didn't seem to mind. Instead her friend patted the space on the bench beside her.

Holly sat with a thunk. "Wow. Here I thought I was giving you an A+ Christmas—and I totally flunked."

The door to the office creaked open behind them, and the girls turned to find Mrs. Bunce waving them back in. Nervous, Holly tried to read the principal's expression.

"Well," said Mrs. Kroll, "the verdict is in. Emma's family will not be winning a vacation to Boulder Pines Lodge this year."

Emma's cheeks burned and Holly raised her hand. "But Mrs. Kroll, that's OK, because she never wanted it. I only wish I never—"

"Please wait until I finish?" Mrs. Kroll asked.

Holly nodded and shrunk in her seat.

"Someone else is going to win," said Mrs. Kroll. "A family chosen by the Community Aid Society."

Holly looked to Mrs. Bunce and Mr. Linton, and discovered each wearing a sly smile.

"Channel 4 agreed to help," confirmed Mrs. Kroll.

"Holly!" cried Emma, shaking her by the shoulder. "You hear that? You did it! You got a family the extra prize."

"I did? That's so cool!" Holly said, and added cautiously, "Am I in trouble?"

"We talked it over," said Mr. Linton, "and though you did get carried away with the, uh, holiday spirit, we agree that your intentions were good."

Mrs. Kroll looked over her glasses. "Understand that we will award the prize fairly. And you must promise not to contact anyone on the school's behalf ever again."

Holly held up her hand and pledged. "Never, ever, *ever.*"

"I think," whispered Emma on their way out, "that the principal just changed your F in Christmas back to A+."

"Nope," said Holly. "No new grade until after tomorrow. I've still got Cookie-palooza to make up."

"Agreed," Emma said, smiling warmly. "After all, it wouldn't be our Christmas without it." ★

Meet the Author

Kathleen O'Dell

I love making Christmas cookies, but my grandmother was a holiday cookie master. Her best work? A frosting- and candy-covered gingerbread house—complete with wicked witch. Today, I try to carry on the tradition by making a little gingerbread house of my own each year.

AG's Puzzle Page

Feathered Friends

Whooo are these girls? They're Josie F., age 9, and Maggie D., age 10, of Florida. See if you can spot eight differences between these two pictures.

Turn to page 48 for the answers

Posters: Carefully cut along the dotted lines to remove your posters.

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HELP!

Dear *American Girl*,

I have two best friends who mean the world to me but are always fighting. It's awkward. I feel like I'm in the way and also left out.

Feeling Weird

It's no fun feeling like a third wheel, even when you don't want to be part of the action. Tell your friends that you care about both of them but that their fights make you feel bad: "I'm feeling left out, even though you two are just fighting. Can we try something else?" If the fights continue, spend time one-on-one instead of together.

Dear *American Girl*,

My birthday is in December, but I wish it was in summer, because I can't do anything fun with a winter birthday.

Too cold to party

You can make your birthday special, no matter when it is. Pizza dinners, cozy sleepovers, indoor mini golf, at-home fashion shows, indoor rock climbing, video-game marathons, pottery painting, movies, indoor swimming, dance parties, skating, and cupcake decorating are lots of fun. And they also are awesome party ideas for birthdays any time of year—including December.

★

Dear *American Girl*,

How can I "connect" with my teacher? She is very strict, but I don't think she wants to act mean. I just want her to like me.

Strict teacher

Not all teachers talk to students in a warm or friendly way. It sounds like this teacher just has a different style, which can be confusing. "Strict" doesn't equal "mean." It just means that this teacher might not be silly or chatty with you. Teachers appreciate students who work hard, follow directions, and don't disrupt class. If that describes you, then this teacher probably thinks you're just fine.

★

Dear *American Girl*,

I worry all the time. My parents say that I get that from my grandmother. Does that mean I can't change it?

Worrier

Your parents might mean that your worrying *reminds* them of your grandma. Sure, some traits do run in families, but how you deal with your feelings is all your own. When you're worried, make a list of the things you can control and the things you can't, then let go of all the can'ts. You might come from a family of worriers, but you're your own girl and can make your own choices.

★

Illustrations: Laura Cornell

MORE HELP!

Dear *American Girl,*

My friends have started texting. I wasn't allowed to text friends, but I asked my mom anyway, and she said I could, with one rule: that I had to show her ALL my texts. So what should I do—show my mom every conversation, or not text at all?

Confused

Parents have lots of worries about texting—loss of conversation or spelling skills; texting instead of sleeping, studying, or spending time with family; and cyberbullying or drama. Most girls face at least one of those issues when texting. It might feel uncomfortable to let your mom in on your conversations. But if texting is important to you, how about trying it under her rules? Let your friends know that your mom will be seeing your phone so that you all can text carefully. If you can show your mom that you can handle texting, she might relax her rules in time. Talk over all this stuff with her so that each of you can understand how the other feels.

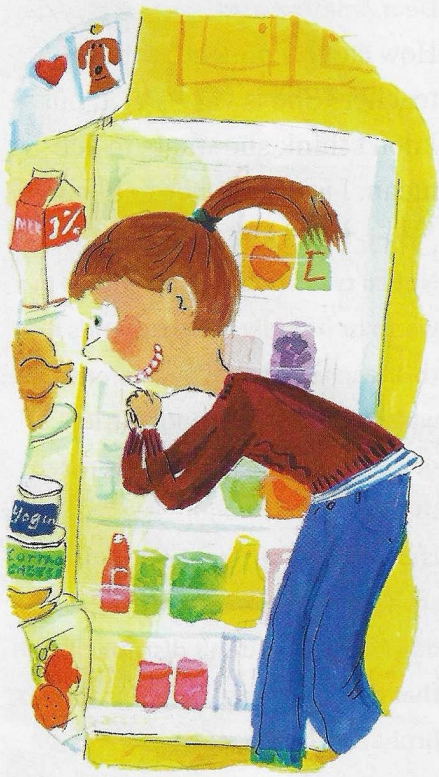
★

Dear *American Girl,*

I am hungry ALL THE TIME. I know I'm not supposed to eat constantly, but I want to. It's not that I eat junk food. I'm just always looking in the fridge or pantry for more, more, MORE.

Is that normal?

It's a good idea to mention body questions to your parent or doctor, but for most girls, feeling hungry is very normal. Your body is growing and changing like crazy right now, and it needs fuel to do that—just as a growing plant needs sunshine and water. Fill up on foods that help you feel fuller for longer: peanut butter, oatmeal, apples, and yogurt. Drink lots of water, too—thirst sometimes can feel just like hunger.



★

Dear *American Girl,*

My bad habit is never finishing things. When I start homework, for example, I get distracted, and it takes me much longer than it should to finish. I get in trouble sometimes for that, so this habit is ruining my life.

Distracted

Solve the homework problem first. Find a quiet, uncluttered spot to be your distraction-free zone. Put your phone or tablet in another room. Then set a timer. Focus hard for 20 minutes, and then get up and take a five-minute break. It might take a few weeks to develop this habit of focusing, but be patient. Once you've mastered it, it can help with other distracting situations, too.

★

even MORE HELP!

Dear *American Girl,*

My parents and I fight a lot. I try not to argue, but it comes out anyway, and I usually end up crying in my room. I wish we could sit down and talk things out, but that would feel awkward.

Happy Family?

Which is worse—crying or feeling awkward? Ask your parents to work with you to make your arguments more peaceful. Write down your feelings and concerns, then share them. Promise to listen to one another, and pick a code word to use when you need to go cool off. You'll still disagree sometimes, but fewer fights will make a happier home.

★

Dear *American Girl,*

It is my dream to be in a movie. I always hear stories about girls who act in school plays and then get discovered by someone in the audience, and the next minute those girls are in movies! How can I make that happen?

Undiscovered

Many stars would tell you that part of their success is incredibly good luck. The other part is skill, and that's the only part you can control. If you want to be an actor, learn to act. Go to theater camps or classes. Talk to your librarian about studying scripts. Audition for plays at school or in your community. Nurture other performing skills such as dance or singing. Actors work hard, and you should plan to also if you want to follow that dream. Break a leg!

★

Dear *American Girl,*

All my friends have started dating! They want me to do it, too. I tell them we're only in fifth grade, but then they don't want to talk to me about it.

Helpless

Good for you—you're staying true to yourself! If you think you're too young to date boys, you don't have to, no matter what your friends say. (This goes for any choices your friends make that don't feel right for you.) Because everyone is different, there's no need to tell others that they're too young to date—just leave it at thanks-but-no-thanks. Try: "I'm glad dating is making you happy, but I'm just not into it right now." Then change the subject.

★

Advice from You

"When in doubt, draw it out! If you feel unsure about something, start drawing pictures of how you feel. It might sound silly, but it really helps. You can also use this strategy at school."

Amit Y.
Age 10, California

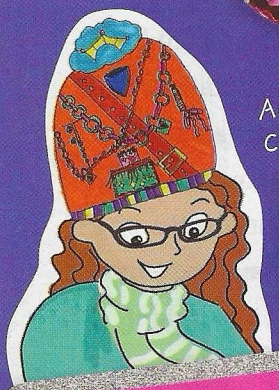
Need advice? Got advice? Write:
Help!
***American Girl* magazine**
8400 Fairway Place
Middleton, WI 53562

Here's our cover model, Isabella, being silly for the camera.

Photos: Steven Talley

Behind the Scenes

It's a fun and festive issue of *American Girl*.



Anna L., age 10, California

Many readers sent us winter hats and envelopes covered with doodles from "Make Your Mark" in the May/June 2013 issue. Like this one!

To see more winter hats you'd love to wear, go to

americangirl.com/playmagazine

In our March/April 2013 issue, we featured ideas for taking better pictures of your pets. Gabrielle O., age 10, of Pennsylvania and her Girl Scout troop used those tips to earn their photography badges. Fun!

First they practiced at a meeting with stuffed animals.

Then they used our tips with their real pets.

AG's Puzzle Page Answers:

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Illustrations: Carol Yoshizumi

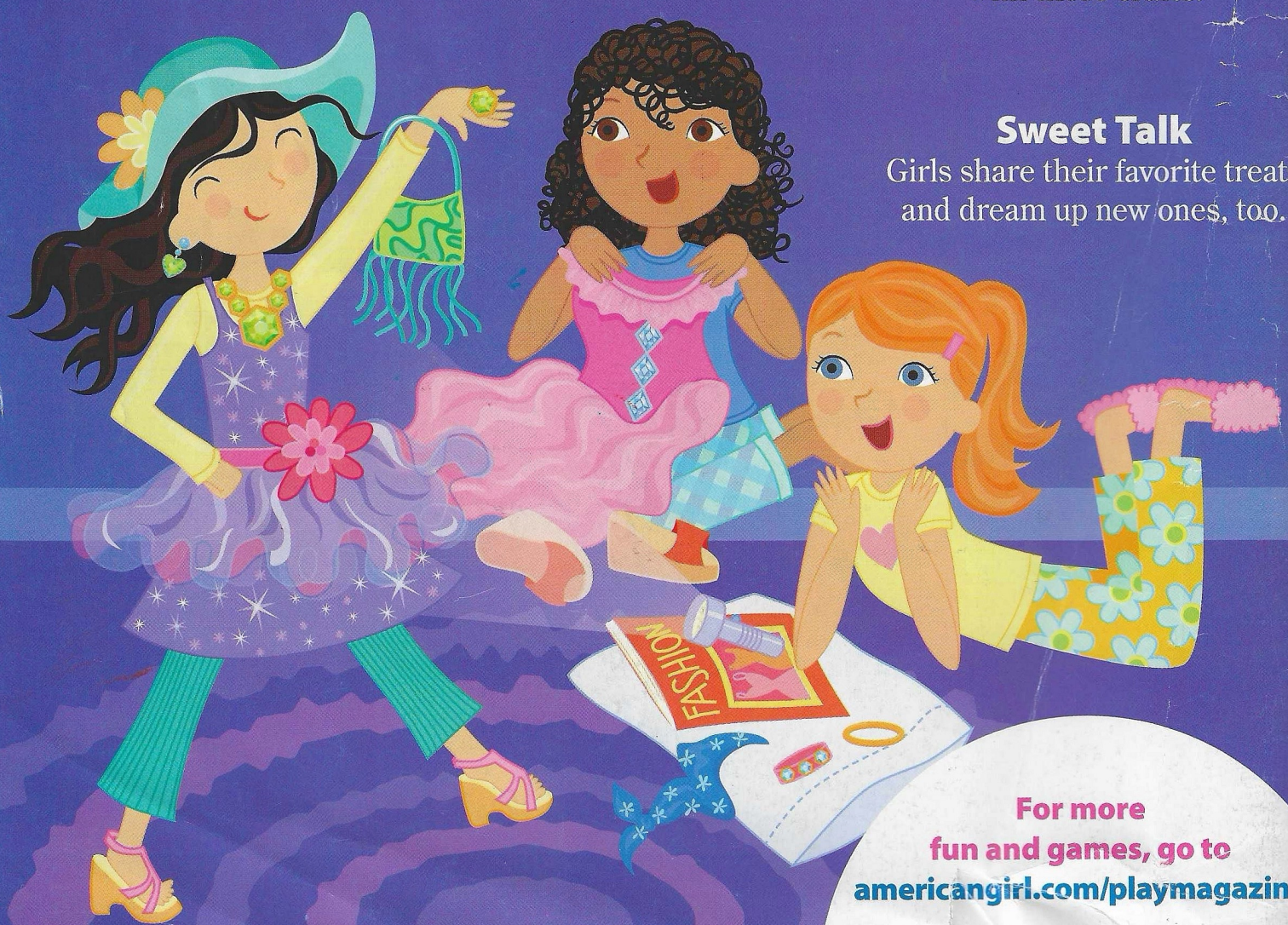
Coming up in the January/February issue of *American Girl* magazine

Fashion Bash
Have fun with your friends at a stylish sleepover.

This or That?
Our Valentine's Day quiz is sure to make you giggle.

Have a Heart!
You'll fall in love with these crafts.

Sweet Talk
Girls share their favorite treats and dream up new ones, too.



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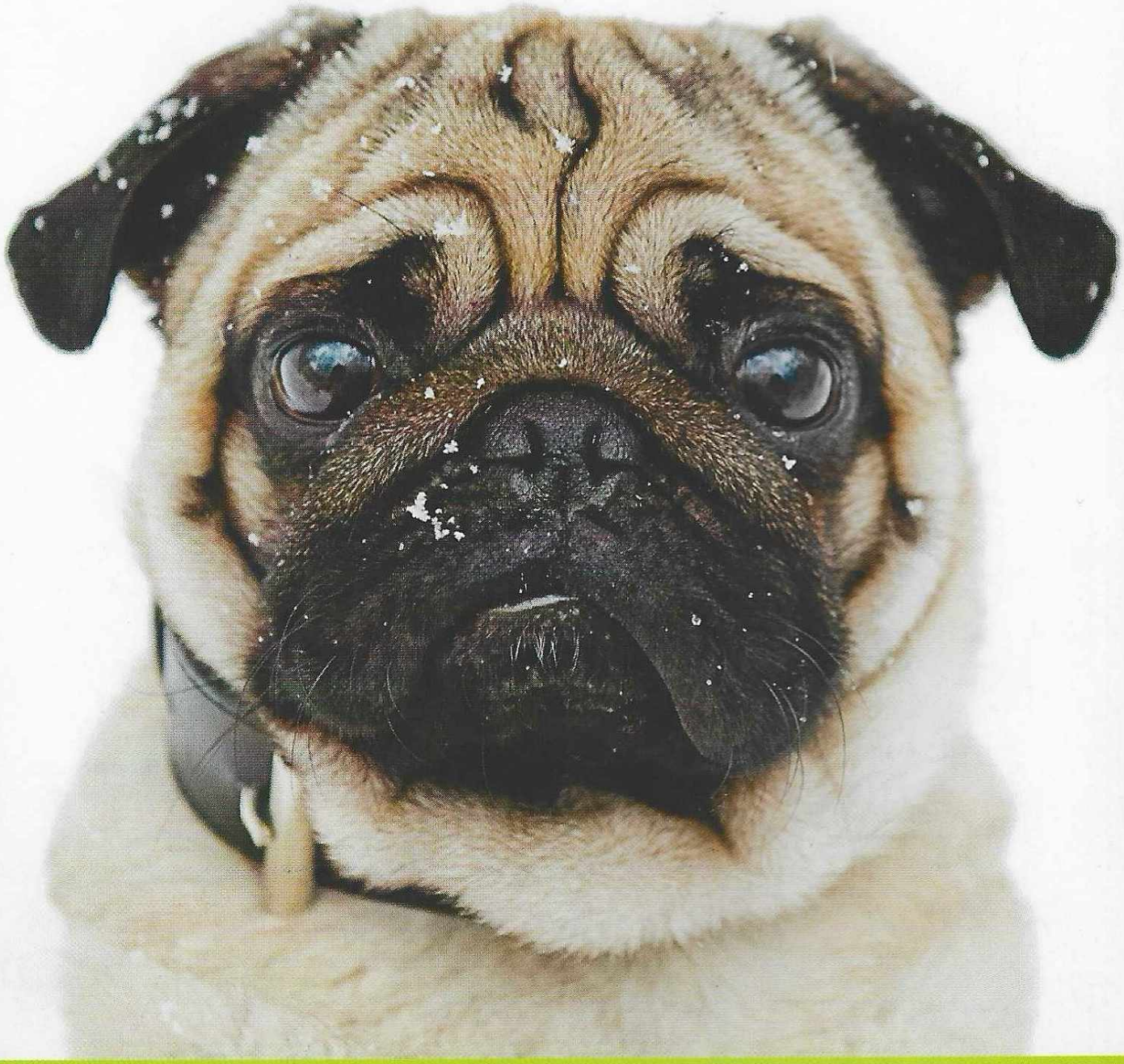

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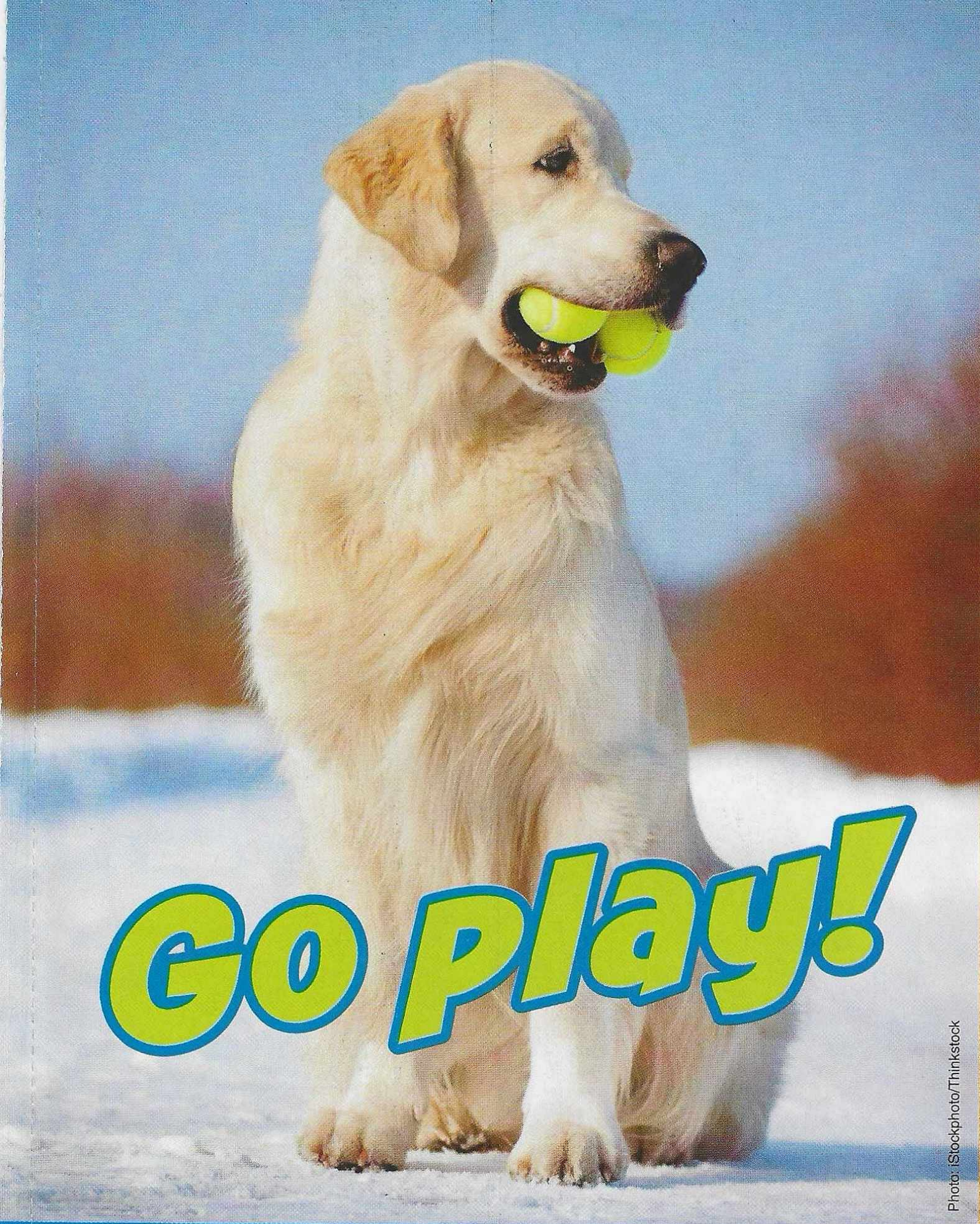

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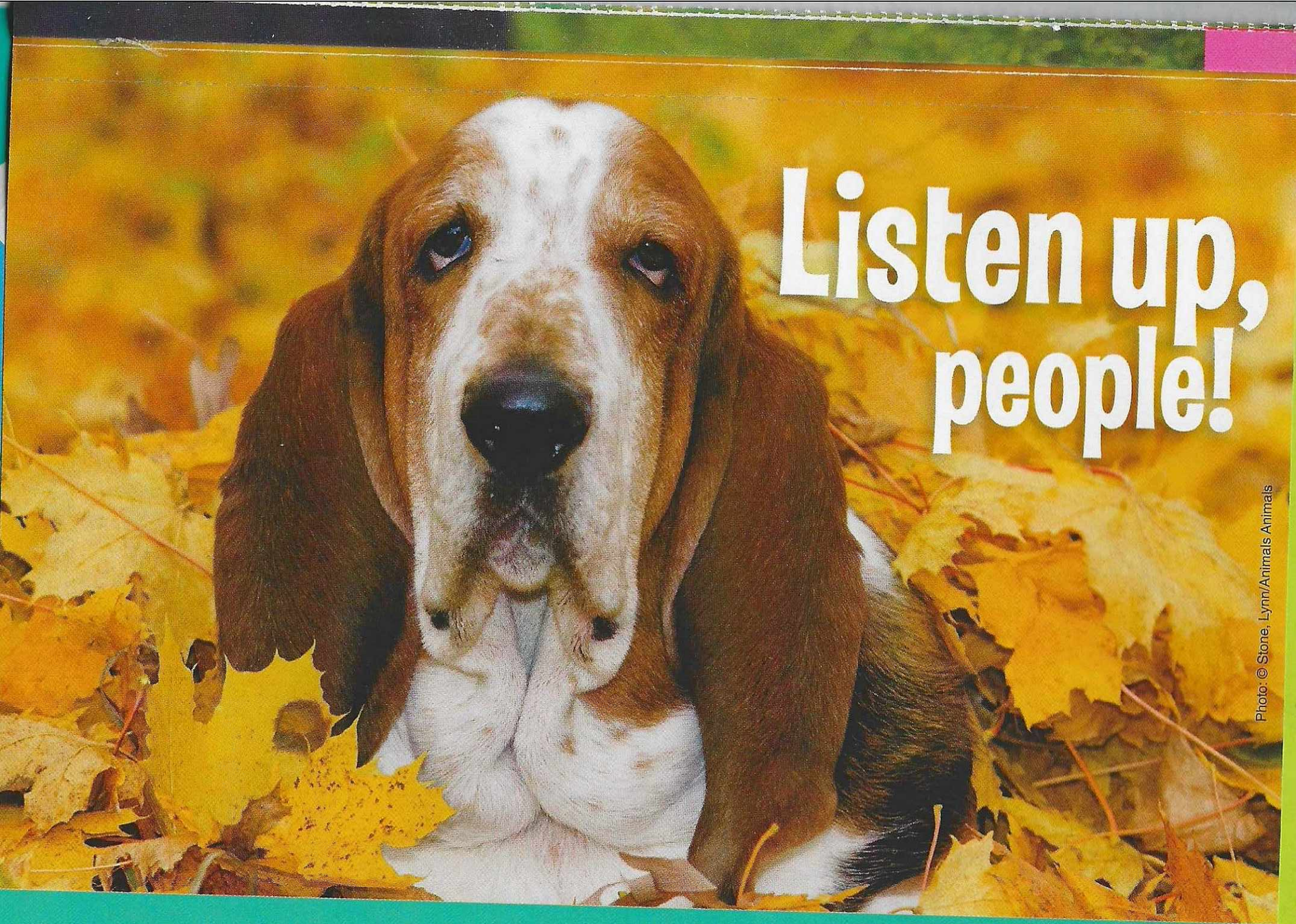

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